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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/LOGGERFO

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SUBJECT: FAYYAD AND ABED RABBO ON NATIONAL DIALOGUE AND
CIVIL SOCIETY PROPOSALS

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member Salam Fayyad and PLO Executive Committee (PLO-EC) member Yasir Abed Rabbo told the Consul General at a May 20 meeting in Ramallah that plans are moving forward for the National Dialogue, but some of President Abbas' (Abu Mazen) closest advisors do not understand how the dialogue fits into a broader strategy for isolating HAMAS. Fayyad and Abed Rabbo discussed plans to reinvigorate the Palestinian NGO sector to create alternatives to civil and social institutions dominated by HAMAS. END SUMMARY.

National Dialogue

12. (C) Abed Rabbo explained that the National Dialogue, scheduled for May 25 and 26, is intended to be the first step in a political scenario that will isolate HAMAS and break the political stalemate. According to Abed Rabbo, the event will include 300 representatives from Fatah, HAMAS, the PLO EC and civil society members. Abed Rabbo said he is writing Abu Mazen's speech, which will emphasize that the current crisis facing the Palestinian people is a political rather than a financial crisis, brought on by HAMAS' refusal to accept a "positive" agenda. Abu Mazen will urge the National Dialogue participants to endorse the Arab League Initiative and the Quartet conditions, noting that if they fail to come to an agreement he will "take the matter to the people," possibly via a national referendum.

13. (C) Abed Rabbo predicted that there is "zero percent chance" that the National Dialogue would produce an agreement. Abed Rabbo explained that he didn't believe Hamas would accept the idea of a referendum, as they would see it as calling into question the Hamas victory in the January PLC elections. However, Abed Rabbo saw the referendum offer as a useful political ploy to corner Hamas and give Abu Mazen an excuse to dissolve the government if Hamas refused a referendum. In the unlikely event Hamas accepted a referendum, Abed Rabbo estimated that 60-70 percent of Palestinians would vote in favor. Abed Rabbo said these steps would expose the "widening gap" between HAMAS' program and the Palestinian national agenda. Abed Rabbo predicted that after the National Dialogue, it will be evident to Palestinians that HAMAS has no solutions to the current crisis and is only interested in holding on to power.

Abed Rabbo: Abu Mazen's
Advisors Don't Get It

14. (C) Abed Rabbo complained that some of Abu Mazen's closest advisors do not understand how the National Dialogue fits into the broader strategy to isolate HAMAS and unify Fatah around Abu Mazen's political agenda. Abed Rabbo noted that Fatah PLC member Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahman had proposed that the National Dialogue serve as a permanent committee when "the point is for it to meet and fail." Likewise, 'Abd al-Rahman had put forward unpopular Fatah figures such as PLC member Nabil Sha'ath and former PM Ahmad Qureia to serve as Fatah's representatives. In contrast to the failure of Abu Mazen's advisors to understand the strategic aspect of the dialogue, Abed Rabbo said the HAMAS leadership appears to have already begun strategizing for the dialogue. Abed Rabbo noted that the HAMAS leadership have downplayed the dialogue's importance in their public statements and begun jockeying behind the scenes for a discussion on HAMAS' political priorities, i.e. implementation of the Cairo Understandings on HAMAS' entrance into the PLO.

15. (C) Fayyad concurred, adding that decreased support for HAMAS will not necessarily translate to "increased support for Fatah" if Abu Mazen fails to articulate Fatah's political program and bring the movement "back on the offensive." Fayyad quipped that the entire strategy for the National Dialogue will fail if Abu Mazen merely gives a speech and "goes back to Europe."

Reinvigorating the NGO Sector

16. (C) In response to the Consul General's question, Fayyad and Abed Rabbo discussed plans to reinvigorate Palestinian civil society. Fayyad said he had been in touch with PLC member Muhammad Dahlan regarding a proposal to strengthen

civil society and create alternatives to HAMAS institutions. Abed Rabbo described parallel efforts underway that will focus on three sectors: sports and youth; cultural organizations; and women's issues. Fayyad suggested that an umbrella organization should be established for each of the three sectors that would coordinate funding, activities, and policies. Abed Rabbo said he is working to develop a list of strong contacts and appropriate institutions for the proposal. The Consul General replied that the USG is eager to support Palestinian civil society and the EU and others would likely follow the US lead in such an effort. Abed Rabbo promised to put together a concrete proposal for discussion within the next two weeks.

WALLES